

Carlsson, David Emmanuel (1897–1981)

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David Emmanuel Carlsson was a pastor, youth leader, conference president, Bible teacher, and author.

Early Life and Education

David Emmanuel Carlsson was born on July 8, 1897, in Kumla, Nerike province, Sweden. His parents, who were originally Baptists, became Seventh-day Adventists around 1900. David Carlsson was born into a region of Sweden that was impacted by the great spiritual revival of the late 1800s. In this region, in the 1840s, child preachers proclaimed the coming judgment. Baptists had successfully acquired a strong presence in the entire area by provoking strict dissenter laws. It was also in this region that Adventism started in Sweden in 1880. Nyhyttan Mission School opened here in 1898.

David was baptized on May 1, 1914, by Charles Kahlström in Lindesberg. He started his pastoral studies late (1924-1928) and somewhat reluctantly. He had trained as a furniture maker in his father's trade, which helped him pay his way through school. Poverty was still a constant companion. He had to sleep on the ground behind the pulpit in the meeting tent during his first evangelistic task as a tent warden assisting experienced pastors in their summer campaigns.

Marriage, Ordination, and Ministry

David's first field of responsibility was in South Sweden (Skåne province), where he worked on his own in several places. In 1934, he married Carin Gille, a Bible worker, and together they founded Växjö Church between the years 1934 and 1936. Their four children all served the church during their active years: Birgitta Kazen served as a teacher and missionary to Sierra Leone and Ethiopia with her husband, who was a surgeon, between 1976 and 2002; Kerstin Christiansen as a church elder and as a teacher at the Adventist Junior College, Ekebyholmsskolan, Sweden, for a number of years; and Hans Gille and Lars Gille both as pastors in the Swedish Union.¹ They were to serve the Adventist church faithfully the rest of their lives.²

At his ordination in 1937, Pastor David Carlsson expressed his utter awe and humility facing such a great calling.³ This awe stayed with him. He never sought higher offices but was repeatedly elected to such offices over the years. Pastor Carlsson was a home missionary secretary of the South Swedish Conference (1936); youth leader, home missionary secretary, and Sabbath school secretary of the East-Nordic Union for the countries of Finland and Sweden (1937-1944); president of the North Swedish Conference (1944-1950); youth leader of the East Nordic Union (1950-1955); chaplain of Hultafors Sanatorium (1955-1959); senior pastor at Gothenburg (1959-1962) and Stockholm (1962-1965); pastor and Bible teacher at Ekebyholmsskolan (1965-1968); and, while in retirement, pastor at Uppsala, Örebro (1969-1973).⁴ Most of the administrative offices he held also had a pastoral responsibility for a local church with a substantial membership.

Temperance, Writing, and Pathfinder Work

Pastor Carlsson, at some point, started a temperance society (*Svenska Nykterhetsförbundet*). He collected and produced temperance material that could be used to reach people outside the church.⁵

Pastor Carlsson was also a prolific writer. His notebook filled with all his assignments between 1933 and the 1970s is a silent witness to his diligence and theology. For example, his notebook documents his work as a union youth leader in 1951, when he used Finland's public transportation for three weeks to attend "Week of Prayer" meetings and preach every day at a new place. Some of the sermons he repeated were "Blessed Narrow Way," "Our Home," "Spirit, Water, Blood," "Believe in God," "The Love of God," "Salvation of Sinners," "Arise, Shine," and his most frequently repeated sermon, "The Love of God."⁶

This gospel emphasis was no doubt what was needed in a war-torn Finland. Pastor Carlsson's task was not to preach of the beasts and terrors of the last days of earth. He was no soul-winning mega-evangelist. He was a soul-keeper who instilled hope and God's love in the churches, especially through his lifelong and creative youth work. Encouragement, care, and comfort were the key words in his theology.

Pastor Carlsson and his wife, Carin, attended the youth leader convention at Vejle fjord, Denmark, in August 1939, where the outlines for European youth work were developed.⁷ The war prevented the development of youth work, but this convention gave Pastor Carlsson and Carin the inspiration to launch pathfinder work in Sweden.⁸ Pastor Carlsson found it imperative that pathfinder work should exist in a Swedish context. Part of that work was to find a permanent place for youth camps that were moved to different places during the war. Although Sweden was the only country in Northern Europe to not be involved in World War II, there were still wartime restrictions, and it lacked material possibilities to expand. Yet, the decision stood firm that Sweden should have a place of its own for its youth.

In the spring of 1944, while cycling around to scout out an area along Lake Vättern, Pastor Carlsson found the Västeräng Farm property.⁹ The church acquired the property, and the first summer youth camp took place that same year. Partly due to Pastor Carlsson's tireless love for the youth and for Jesus Christ, Västeräng became a

place of deep spiritual revival loved by generations of young Swedish Adventists and their friends.

During Pastor Carlsson's term as union youth leader for Finland and Sweden, a "Youth Congress" for the Northern European Division was held in Stockholm. It was a media success. There were daily reports and frequent interviews with the international delegates in the national papers and radio coverage. The congress ended with an open-air meeting in the center of Stockholm. An estimated 12,000-15,000 listeners filled the park. Although this was a division event, Pastor Carlsson had planned much of it. His contacts with other organizations and Christians proved to be of great assistance for this church event.

Legacy

Pastor Carlsson's legacy shows in his great contributions to youth work and in his theology grounded in the Gospels of Scripture, in which an assurance of salvation through grace leads to a life of service for all who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. This focus on righteousness by faith made a strong impression on the youth.

In the many books Pastor Carlsson wrote for young people, he documented the impact of the great spiritual revival of the late 1800s and described his own family's road to Adventism. He further conducted historical research about the roparna ("the shouters," the name given to the child preachers of the 1840s), in his book, *Roparna*, published in 1978, one of the few documented accounts of this phenomenon.

Pastor David Carlsson completed 50 years of active service with his final appointment before retirement as a teacher at the Adventist Junior College at Ekebyholmsskolan. There, as an almost-70-year-old Bible teacher, he baptized 19 youth in 1966¹⁰ and 27 in 1967,¹¹ a record for the school. Many of the young people he baptized remained in the faith for the rest of their lives. David Carlsson died on September 6, 1981, in Rimbo, Sweden.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Gösta Wiklander, *I Herrens tjänst* (In the Lord's Service) (Stockholm: Adventistsamfundet, 2000), 21.
2. David Carlsson, "Memories," unpublished typewritten manuscript, private family collection kept at home of daughter Kerstin Christiansen, Ystad, Sweden.
3. Ibid.
4. Wiklander, 21.
5. Information supplied by Birgitta Kazen, David Carlsson's eldest daughter, interview by author, Nyhyttan, Sweden, 2018.
6. David Carlsson's address book with places and topics noted, private family collection kept at home of daughter Kerstin Christiansen, Ystad, Sweden.
7. Ingrid Albiner, "JMV-kongressen på Vejlefjord," *Ungdomens Budbärare* (Messenger to Young People), September 1939, 5-7, 11; and October 1939, 7-9.
8. A manual for pathfinders: Junior Master Guides (JMV), was compiled and printed in Swedish by Skandinaviska Bokförlaget, Stockholm 1944, kept at HASDA (Historical Archive SDA), Rimbo, Sweden.
9. David Carlsson, "Memories," unpublished manuscript.
10. *Missionären & Ungdomens Budbärare* (The Missionary & Messenger to Young People), June-July 1966, 13.
11. *Missionären & Ungdomens Budbärare* (The Missionary & Messenger to Young People), May 1967, 14.

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